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Merit System Administration Special Report

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MERIT SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION — AN OVERVIEW

The Department of Personnel Administration has long recognized the need to administer the merit system in a way which encourages equal access to the system by a variety of users including applicants, appointing authorities and current employees. Open access to public employment; assistance in establishing a capable and qualified workforce; and assurance of reliable and objective selection/advancement processes are within the forefront of the Department of Personnel Administration's interest in improving the Civil Service System through effective merit system administration.

Effective merit system administration must provide for the simplification of the system through a planned, detailed analysis of merit system activities to improve the responsiveness and accessibility of the system to state agencies, municipalities, applicants and current employees. It must remove those artificial barriers and constraints from the statutes and rules that cause unnecessary administrative burden to the vast array of system users. It must provide an option for decentralization of existing Civil Service responsibilities to allow greater flexibility for system users to design, manage and conduct a local merit system while maintaining standards for compliance through oversight and audit. It must remove excessive delays in each step of the merit system process including examinations, list establishment, certification and selection to enable vital personnel actions to be accomplished within reasonable time periods. And finally, it must assist agency officials in meeting affirmative action requirements in the selection and development of qualified minority applicants.

These are the demands being placed on the Civil Service System; demands which require new ways of looking at how merit principles can be applied in a creative and innovative fashion to meet changing needs through effective merit system administration. Examples of this process in action are further explored in this special report covering the following initiatives undertaken by the Department of Personnel Administration (DPA) to improve the merit system process:

- Civil Service Simplification and Improvement Project
- Changes in Personnel Administration Rules
- Personnel Delegation Rules
- Improvements in Examination Process
- Improvements in the State and Local Government Certification Process
- Public Safety Seminars
- Affirmative Action Recruitment

CIVIL SERVICE SIMPLIFICATION & IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

This project was initiated to make the merit system more responsive and accessible to state agencies, applicants, and current employees. Due to the size and complexity of the task, the project was divided into five distinct steps spanning the period from early FY-86 through FY-87, including an identification of resources needed for FY-88 implementation.

Step I of this project consisted of an in-depth study of the current Civil Service System from July through October, 1985. This was accomplished through consultation with DPA managers and other interested parties. The process included a detailed review of workflow, procedures, forms, records, and systems support in relation to laws, rules, and policies; and identification of "throughput capacity" and "choke points". The result of this study was the development of approximately 50 recommendations for increasing efficiency and productivity.

Step II focused on the development, from November, 1985 through February, 1986, of strategies to address some specific problems identified in Phase I. These included streamlining the certification of qualified candidates for high-turnover titles; eliminating the distinction between permanent and temporary Civil Service status in most cases; automating the scoring of eligibility and experience; and developing an open, continuous, non-written examination procedure for titles requiring licenses or certifications.

In Step III, the project staff assisted appropriate DPA managers from March through June, 1986 to implement recommendations from Step I; to

develop procedures to implement Chapter 527, Acts of 1985, which delegated eligibility determinations to appointing authorities; and to plan and hold public hearings on changes in the Personnel Administration Rules.

During Step I, it became apparent that these improvements would maximize the efficiency of the existing system but not allow as rapid and effective response to all user needs as could be achieved. Consequently, a conceptual proposal for a New Examination Program involving fundamental changes to the system was developed in November and December, 1985. Step IV, which tracked simultaneously with Step III, was spent incorporating input from DPA senior staff and other interested parties to refine the model and identify resources needed for implementation in Step V. Features of the New Examination Program proposal include:

(1) Test battery examinations by occupational field, allowing coverage of all state titles within each two-year cycle. This approach would enable applicants to qualify for many related titles by taking a single examination.

(2) Standing eligible pools resulting from examinations, allowing automated production of certifications immediately upon on-line entry of requisitions and provisional appointments by state agencies.

(3) Concentrating the competitive examination process on those levels in career ladders where testing is needed to measure job knowledge. Agency-level non-competitive promotions would be authorized at all other points in the career ladder. Appointing authorities and unions would be actively involved in planning examinations, identifying paths, and participating in the non-competitive promotion process.

Fiscal year 1987 will be spent chiefly on preparation for a pilot test of the New Examination Program. Preparations will include development of procedures and forms; extensive systems and programming changes; development of legislative and rule change proposals; and consultation with concerned parties. Successful implementation of the New Examination Program should result in a merit system that: provides state agencies with qualified candidates when they are needed; expands the role for appointing authorities and unions in merit system administration; gives realistic career and career advancement information to applicants and employees.

CHANGES IN PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION RULES

On May 21, 1986 the Department of Personnel Administration held a hearing on proposed amendments to the Personnel Administration Rules which were issued in final form on July 7, 1986. The amendments reflect changes in Civil Service procedures mandated by Chapter 527 of the Acts of 1985 which are more responsive to individual applicants. The amended rules provide procedures for the extension of eligible lists and for the determination of entrance requirements at the time of certification by municipal and state appointing authorities. The amended rules also provide for increased discretion to appointing authorities in selecting candidates from open competitive examinations. This hearing and rules issuance was the first of a number of such planned by the Office of Legal Counsel, Department of Personnel Administration, for the purpose of removing artificial barriers from merit system activities and to streamline to the extent practicable operating procedures and instructions.

PERSONNEL DELEGATION PROGRAM

In keeping with the need to provide greater flexibility to agency officials in personnel matters, the Department of Personnel Administration has expanded its delegation program to include authority to State agencies who wish to generate certifications from established eligible lists. A pilot program delegating certification authority was worked out with the Department of Public Works (DPW). The delegation agreement included authority for DPW to obtain expanded access to the Examination List Information Processing System (ELIPSYS) files for the purpose of viewing the eligible lists and making name/address and geographic location code changes for eligibles on lists established specifically for the Department of Public Works. In preparation for the implementation of the delegated authority, DPW employees were trained in the expanded access to the ELIPSYS system and a monitoring plan was devised to provide for oversight and audit of the delegated functions to ensure compliance with DPA standards. Since implementation of the pilot certification delegation program,other state agencies have expressed interest in pursuing this option and coverage under the delegated authority is expected to expand as benefits from decentralization are further experienced.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE EXAMINATION PROCESS

To address one of the major criticisms of the Civil Service System concerning excessive time delays at each step of the process, the Department focused on improving the responsiveness of the system by establishing examination processing timetables and developing the necessary enhancements to the ELIPSYS system to assist in attaining reasonable time frames at each critical phase of the process: examination preparation and scheduling, examination administration, notification of examination results, establishment of eligible lists and certification.

The examination processing timetable included several important milestones: mailing of examination results within 30 days of examination, establishing eligible lists within 60 days of the examination and issuing certifications to appointing authorities within 90 days of the date of the examination. This so-called "30/60/90 day program", coupled with enhancements to the ELIPSYS automated examination routine has resulted in significant improvements in the time intervals required in the examination and certification processing cycle. For example, all major entry level public safety examinations including police officer, fire-fighter, correction officer, parole officer and motor vehicle examiner have been conducted on a timely basis during this reporting period. Moreover, due to the significant advances in examination processing by means of computer system enhancements, the examination results for both police officer and fire-fighter examinations were sent to the examinees by 60 days from the respective examination dates. These two examinations represented 11,419 examinees for the police officer and 9,235 for the fire-fighter titles.

Additionally, for the first time in 10 years a promotional examination was held for the rank of sergeant for the Boston Police Department. This examination was held pursuant to a Federal court consent decree, and was subject to considerable legal scrutiny in both development and implementation. The examination was fair and valid and withstood all scrutiny. A Civil Service list was established and the Boston Police Department has made a significant number of promotional appointments from that list. As a result, DPA has been excused completely from the consent decree.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Consistent with the goal of the 30/60/90 day program established by the Department of Personnel Administration, promotional certifications to state appointing authorities have been issued in a majority of instances within 90 days of the examination and substantial improvements have been made in issuing certifications from open competitive examinations. This represents a significant improvement over prior certification actions. The average time from the date an eligible list is established to the date of actual certification has been dramatically reduced allowing applicants who have taken examinations for civil service positions in the state service more rapid consideration for employment. Recent improvements have also provided greater response to the needs of state appointing authorities through a more predictable and reliable certification process. Future plans involve enhancements to existing computer systems and implementation of office automation technology to further improve certification planning, scheduling and tracking.

Efforts have also focused on offering state appointing authorities assistance in interpreting and applying changes in the statutes and rules and in the overall Civil Service process. A series of orientation sessions and outreach meetings designed to better acquaint users with the Civil Service System have been and will continue to be offered and promoted. These meetings have been most helpful in underscoring the importance placed in using certifications generated from eligible lists and in resolving outstanding certification issues through mutual interaction and consensus.

In July, 1984, the Personnel Administrator established the Bureau of Local Government Services, a new organizational unit within DPA designed to centralize a wide range of municipal functions and programs administered by the agency, to increase agency focus on municipal issues, and to improve agency services to the 251 communities now covered by the merit system.

At the time of the Bureau's establishment, a need for priority action in two major areas was recognized:

1. reduction in certification and appointment review delay; and
2. increased technical assistance and training for municipal officials and appointing authorities.

The establishment of the Bureau coincided with the introduction of a newly automated certification system to a previously all-manual unit. As a result, the elapsed time between receipt of a cleared Public Safety requisition and issuance of a certification has been reduced from an average period of four months to an average of thirty days for entry level

titles and two weeks for promotional titles. The procedures used to effect this improvement are now being directed towards non-public safety titles.

To improve municipal understanding of and access to the merit system, a variety of personnel memoranda and materials has been developed and distributed, on topics ranging from appointment processes and consent decree requirements through new legislative requirements and a general directory for Municipal Appointing Authorities.

A variety of training programs has been developed and held for municipal appointing authorities including full-scale programs in Labor Service procedures and informal technical assistance meetings with individual communities. Foremost among these was a series of Public Safety seminars detailed as follows:

PUBLIC SAFETY SEMINARS

In September and October of 1985, the Department of Personnel Administration conducted a series of Public Safety seminars. The purpose of these seminars was to provide information to the Municipal Public Safety Appointing Authorities, both Police and Fire, concerning a range of Civil Service topics. Eighteen seminars were conducted on nine separate dates in Springfield, Boston, Worcester, Mansfield and Danvers. Of the 279 police and fire departments subject to Civil Service 213 attended these seminars.

The seminars provided an overview of the Civil Service process including:

- requisition and certification processes;
- medical policies;
- examinations;
- special certifications, reinstatement and transfer;
- improvement and simplification of the Civil Service System; and
- history and impact of the consent decree.

The seminars were both well attended and well received. In addition to police and fire chiefs, municipal personnel directors, and city and town managers, a number of mayors and members of boards of selectmen were in attendance. In total, over 400 individuals participated in the seminars.

To quote one participant, "I found the seminar not only informative but, I gained a great deal of insight into [the] goals for the Department of Personnel Administration for the future. I had a number of questions that [the Department's] . . . staff were able to answer for me to my complete satisfaction." The solid foundation of factual information concerning Civil Service that was created by the seminars permitted DPA to build a better working relationship with the majority of public safety departments in the Commonwealth. Improved understanding of Civil Service requirements and the opportunity to listen to the legitimate criticisms and concerns of the public safety appointing authorities permitted a marked improvement in our performance during Fiscal Year 1986 as well as for the future.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RECRUITMENT

A full scale recruitment campaign was undertaken to assist officials in cities and towns covered by the federal consent decree concerning police and fire-fighter entry level positions. This extensive recruitment plan focused on attracting Black and Hispanic applicants to entry level public safety fire-fighter and police positions through a vast media and information dissemination program. Although each city and town under the decree was provided assistance, fourteen (14) cities and towns were targeted for special efforts. A key facet of the program entailed soliciting the help and cooperation of minority community leaders, city officials, Affirmative Action Officers, local personnel staffs, fire and police chiefs and incumbent fire-fighters and police officers.

A wide range of recruitment strategies was employed to reach large segments of the minority population including:

- radio, T.V. and newspaper advertising;
- distribution of recruitment literature and mailings to community organizations, groups, churches, schools and training institutions;
- passing out flyers at malls and public transit stations;
- hanging posters in community buildings; and
- conducting orientation seminars and visiting schools and colleges.

A team of five recruiters for fire fighter positions and four recruiters for police positions were assigned to full-time recruitment under the direction and general guidance of a Department of Personnel Administration representative. These teams were supplemented by student interns who helped in handling the distribution of information to interested applicants and to various sources within the consent decree communities. The teams were further assisted by over sixty (60) community leaders, fire fighters, police officers and city personnel officials across the state. These combined efforts resulted in the recruitment of 1,403 minority applicants for fire-fighter positions and 2,135 minority applicants for police officer positions.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

The following charts and graphs depict the extent of the examination, certification and outreach efforts accomplished by the Department of Personnel Administration during the reporting period.

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION
EXAMINATION STATISTICS

Functions	FY-85	FY-86
Examinations Produced	85	80
Examinations Held	798	661
Applicants Examined	37,960	39,223
Alphabetical Lists Processed	793	840
Pass/Fail Notices Sent to Applicants	37,165	52,371
Medicals Held	1,389	546
Strength Tests Held	1,048	433
Eligible Lists Established	623	668
Eligible Candidates on Lists	45,628	43,873

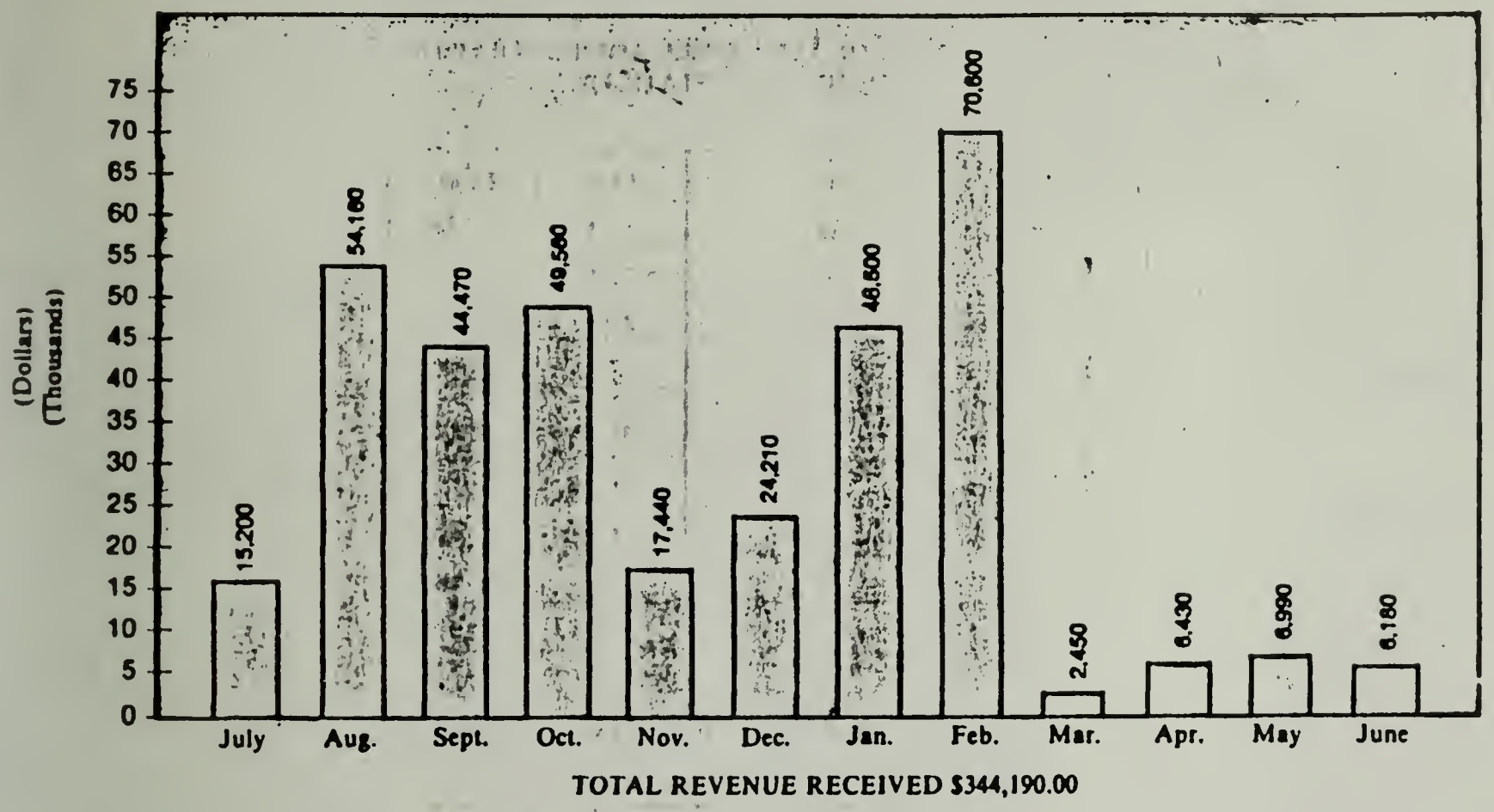
DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION
CERTIFICATION AND APPOINTMENT TABLE - STATE SERVICE

Functions	FY-85	FY-86
Certifications sent to State Agencies Official and Labor Service	3,105	3,329
DPA approved Applicants from Certification		
Labor Service	348	322
Official Service	3,067	4,032
TOTAL	3,415	4,354
Requisitions received		
Official and Labor Service	12,765	12,210
Applicants notified for Employment Interview		
Official and Labor Service	169,648	168,360

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION
CERTIFICATION AND APPOINTMENT TABLE - LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Functions	FY-85	FY-86
Certifications sent to Cities & Towns		
Public Safety	930	1,287
Municipal	2,486	971
TOTAL	3,416	2,258
DPA approved Applicants from Certification		
Public Safety	1,371	4,135
Municipal	2,032	3,120
TOTAL	3,403	7,255
Requisitions received		
Public Safety	939	1,737
Municipal	2,487	1,311
TOTAL	3,426	3,048
Applicants notified for Employment Interview		
Public Safety	21,604	50,459
Municipal	107,303	38,066
TOTAL	128,907	88,525

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION
APPLICATION FEES RECEIVED FY-86



TOTAL REVENUE RECEIVED $344,190.00

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

PUBLIC SAFETY SEMINARS

SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER, 1985

SUMMARY TOTALS

DATES	LOCATION	SEMINARS	DEPARTMENTS ATTENDING	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	DEPARTMENTS REGISTERED, NOT IN ATTENDANCE	DEPARTMENTS NOT REGISTERED OR ATTENDING
Sept. 10-11	Springfield	4	29	68	6	0
Sept. 19-20	Boston	4	71	152	10	9
Sept. 24-25	Worcester	4	34	61	4	4
Oct. 1-2	Mansfield	4	46	81	16	12
Oct. 8	Danvers	2	33	61	5	0
	TOTALS	18	213	423	41	25

Departments Attending: 213 of the 279 subject to Civil Service.